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ABSTRACT

The empowerment paradigm with roots in the literature of education and management (both applied and theoretical) can guide faculty to help prepare students to make the transition from the classroom to the boardroom. While numerous faculty leaders have joined corporate leaders in espousing the virtues of empowerment, most classes in business schools are run in a bureaucratic, teacher focused, lecture oriented fashion which creates feelings of powerlessness and fosters dysfunctions. The values and practices of the empowerment paradigm are designed to facilitate student learning, self-efficacy, commitment, and motivation. Empowering faculty strive to identify and remove factors that promote feelings of powerlessness in their students. Practical reasons for creating empowered students include: (1) most students do not find bureaucratic pedagogical practices to be motivating; (2) traditional bureaucratic pedagogies create powerlessness; and (3) traditional pedagogies are not aligned with the practices and needs of industry. The key is to fashion an open, creative, team environment in which both faculty and students understand the vision of empowerment and are motivated to contribute to its success. In the face of personal, professional, institutional, and social pressures, implementing an empowerment paradigm is not easy. Shifting paradigms from bureaucracy to empowerment in the classroom is imperative for the 1990s. (Contains 33 references.) (RS)

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# Moving From Bureaucracy To Empowerment: Shifting Paradigms To Practice What We Preach In Class

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## ABSTRACT

In education the faculty may be thought of as classroom managers and the students may be viewed as employees. Following this analogy, we argue that the use of traditional bureaucratic teaching practices generates dysfunctions in the teaching-learning process that are similar to the problems bureaucratic management styles promote in industry.

This paper starts by defining empowerment and explaining why we advocate the use of an empowerment based paradigm. We then discuss specific behavioral outcomes and suggest techniques for achieving them. Finally, we describe the conditions under which the empowerment paradigm is most appropriate. Throughout the paper we indicate how our pedagogical ideas are rooted in the theoretical and applied management and education literature on empowerment.

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## Moving from Bureaucracy to Empowerment: Shifting Paradigms to Practice What We Preach in Class

### Introduction

Modern managers can no longer act as dictators, cops, or task masters. Rather, they must act as educators who promote developmental processes such as autonomy, quality, personal growth, continuous learning, and the ability to cope with change. As GE's CEO Jack Welch stated, "we've got to take out the boss element ... we're going to win on our ideas ... not by whips and chains" (Stewart, 1991, p. 41). Like Welch, many authors are encouraging managers to stop following the traditional paradigm of bureaucratic control and start practicing a new paradigm based on the principles of decentralization (c.f. Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Block, 1987; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Kanter, 1983; Neilsen, 1986; Peters & Austin, 1985; Walton, 1990). They suggest that this alternative approach to management enhances variables critical to organizational performance and will better enable firms to survive in an increasingly competitive and global environment. They also believe the practice of these principles creates empowered managers who are capable of empowering those around them (Atchinson, 1991; Block, 1987; Louis, 1986; Neilsen, 1986). Thus, as Corning's CEO Jamie Houghton said, "if you really believe in quality, empower your people" (Dumaine, 1990, p. 52).

There is significant support for developing and implementing an empowerment based paradigm (c.f. Atchinson, 1991; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Block, 1987; Conger, 1989; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Dumaine, 1991; Kanter, 1983; Louis, 1986; Macher, 1988; Peters & Austin, 1985; Smith, 1991; Stewart, 1990; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Walton, 1990; Zemke, 1988). This support has fostered a greater spirit of collaboration between business and academia. As Cincinnati

Bell Chairman Dwight Hibbard recently stated, "The science and practice of empowerment might finally link the business professor with the practicing manager."

While numerous faculty leaders have joined corporate leaders in espousing the virtues of empowerment, a walk through the halls of most Business Schools tells a different story. The typical course is conducted in a manner that neither adheres to the tenets upon which empowerment is based nor teaches the skills students need to become empowered and empowering. When it comes to managing their classes many faculty hold the same attitudes, display the same behaviors, and create the same climates that they criticize in practicing managers as obsolete. They run class in a bureaucratic, teacher focused, lecture oriented fashion even though they expect their students to be prepared for the opposite when they enter the business world. The implicit message communicated by such faculty is, "Do as I say, not as I do."

The bureaucratic approach to instruction may have been practical and perhaps appropriate in the fifties, sixties, and early seventies. It is not appropriate for students of the nineties because they are imbued with a greater sense of self-worth and view authority figures with less deference than their predecessors (c.f. Louis, 1986; Neilsen, 1986; Yankelovich, 1978). The idealized authority students once unquestioningly granted to faculty and upon which most traditional teaching paradigms are based has become obsolete (c.f. Block, 1987; Neilsen, 1986; Yankelovich, 1978). Today students desire and expect autonomy, inclusion, and influence in the teaching-learning process (c.f. Glasser, 1990; McKeachie, 1986).

As a general rule in Business Schools, faculty-student cooperation and student involvement in the teaching-learning process is rare. As a result, many students voice the same concerns raised by their counterparts in industry. For

example, Macher (1988) found that most workers today love their trade but hate their jobs. If you listen as we did in a recent series of interviews, you will often hear students complain that they love their majors but hate their classes. They talk openly about: a) the lack of support, attention, or guidance they receive from faculty; b) the gap between their course work and relevant applications to the world in which they live or are preparing to enter; c) the few opportunities they have to participate in class; and, d) how classes seem structured in ways that over-emphasize grades at the expense of learning. In fact, when we interviewed 40 juniors and seniors regarding their college experience, we found that most of them could only recall having taken one or two classes in which they felt actively involved and excited about learning.

"A frequently cited study by the *Public Agenda Foundation* found that half of the non-managerial workforce worked only hard enough to keep their jobs" (Macher, 1988, p. 41). "How hard are our students working?" Given the similarity between traditional teaching practices and traditional management practices, the answer might well be "halfheartedly." Visualize students in a required class at a randomly selected Business School as a group of municipal street repair workers. If they were working as hard as the students do in a traditionally run class, the majority would be leaning on their shovels, snacking and chatting, perfectly happy to let someone else do the work. Of the remaining who were working, few would be working hard, and it is likely that none would be doing high quality work. Therefore, this paper will argue that the quality of the teaching-learning process could be enhanced if more faculty practiced principles suitable for the dynamic learning context of the 1990's.

The argument presented in this paper is based on four premises. First, students today bring to class different backgrounds, needs, values, and desires than their predecessors (c.f. Louis, 1986; Yankelovich, 1978). Second, because of

these differences Business faculty must shift away from bureaucratic control of the learning process toward a paradigm based on cooperation, trust, and mutual sharing of class control (Glasser, 1990; Louis, 1986; McKeachie, 1986). Third, both environmental factors [e.g. pressures to publish, antiquated evaluation procedures] and personal factors [e.g. high need for control, low feelings of personal empowerment] contribute to the unwillingness and inability of many faculty to recognize the need for and desire to change their pedagogy (c.f. Conger, 1989; Neilsen, 1986). Fourth, the need to change paradigms is as great in the college teaching environment as it is in business.

This paper will focus on the second and third premises. We will discuss how the teaching-learning process can be enhanced and aligned with the needs of our times if we apply rather than just talk about the principles of empowerment. We will: a) define empowerment and explain why we advocate the use of an empowerment based paradigm; b) discuss some conditions that create student feelings of powerlessness; c) suggest some techniques that might be applied to help empower students; and, d) discuss some limitations to implementing an empowerment based paradigm. Throughout each section we will provide some links between our ideas and the management and education literature from which they evolved. We will also integrate some of the initial findings from a current research project we are conducting on class empowerment in each section. We hope the paper challenges, stimulates constructive controversy, and generates some inspiration for greater application of these concepts.

## Definition and Philosophy

Currently there is little agreement on the definition of empowerment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Conger & Kanungo (1988) provided some insight for clarifying the concept when they suggested that an understanding of empowerment should be based upon a psychological, motivational, or self-efficacy foundation. This

approach provides the empowerment literature with a common theme that helps in understanding appropriate interventions for promoting empowerment as well as the effects of those interventions. In this context, empowerment provides a label for a non-traditional paradigm of motivation (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Because of this motivational base empowerment principles are equally applicable to both the teaching-learning process and the practice of management.

## Educational Empowerment Defined

Empowerment is as much a philosophy as it is a practice. From an instructional perspective, empowerment can be defined as the adherence to certain values (c.f. Block, 1987) and the implementation of certain pedagogical practices (c.f. Block, 1987; McKeachie, 1986; Neilsen, 1986). The values and the practices are designed to facilitate student learning, self-efficacy, commitment, and motivation. It describes those who subscribe to and practice the notion that excellence in teaching and learning can only occur when both faculty and students are actively engaged, and cooperatively involved, in the educational process (Greeson, Shulman, Luechauer, & McLellan, 1991). Our definition integrates process components (e.g., Block, 1987; Conger & Kanungo, 1988) with constructive outcomes (e.g., Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Peters & Austin, 1984).

Adherence to certain values constitutes the first part of our definition. This discussion highlights some of the core values empowering faculty hold. Empowering faculty accept McClelland's (1975) admonition that "... if [teachers] want to have far-reaching influence, they must make their [students] feel powerful and able to accomplish things on their own" (p. 263). Further, they believe that their influence and effectiveness increases to the extent that power is shared in the teaching-learning process. Empowering faculty believe the student is just as important as the instructor in the learning process. That is, they believe students learn best when they are actively involved not when they are passive

recipients of the instructor's pearls of wisdom (Golin, 1990). As a result, empowering faculty value and use pedagogies that emphasize active learning rather than passive reception (Golin, 1990; McKeachie, 1986). They realize learning only occurs in the mind of the student. They do not treat their own experience of the material under study as primary nor do they assume that their students experience the material as they do (c.f. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1986). Therefore, they believe that their role is not to disseminate information but rather to create conditions that foster the readiness, willingness, and ability of students to formulate their own knowledge (c.f. Belenky, et al. 1986; McKeachie, 1986). They strive to connect with their students and they seek to know how their students are experiencing the material (Belenky, et al., 1986). Empowering faculty value emotion in the learning process and encourage self-expression both in and out of class (c.f. Block, 1987). They trust students and do not demand that students must endeavor to earn their trust. Rather, they begin with this trust and treat their students accordingly from the outset of class. Finally, empowering faculty believe that "while the captain may choose direction, the engine room drives the ship" (Block, 1987, p. 72). They realize that while they can go to great lengths to state their intentions, give directions, and generate rewards or sanctions the critical choices (e.g., whether to study, participate, attend, value the topic, etc.) are made by their students. Therefore, empowered faculty ultimately value, believe it is possible, and strive to create a learning environment where the desire to learn comes from factors inside not outside the student.

Operationally, empowering faculty strive to identify and remove factors that promote feelings of powerlessness in their students. In doing so, they replace them with factors that promote ownership, self-efficacy, and the intrinsic motivation to learn rather than to receive extrinsic rewards such as grades (c.f.

Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Louis, 1986; McKeachie, 1986; Neilsen, 1986; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Empowering faculty seek to facilitate discovery, excitement, and personalized learning rather than standardization, memorization, and regurgitation (Glasser, 1990; McKeachie, 1986). They enable students: a) to take personal responsibility for their learning (e.g. Conger & Kanungo, 1988); b) to engage in tasks that are personally meaningful (e.g. Block, 1987); c) to feel a sense of ownership in the tasks they perform (e.g. Peters & Austin, 1985); d) to feel "pulled" by the class rather than pushed by the professor or by grades (e.g., Berlew, 1986); e) to meet their deepest needs for power, significance, autonomy, and true camaraderie (e.g., Macher, 1988); and, f) to feel that their performance in class is primarily in their own hands (e.g., Block, 1987; Neilsen, 1986). However, "an [empowering] teacher is not another student; the role carries an authority based on cooperation not subordination" (Belenky, et al., 1986, p. 227). Thus, empowering faculty move from bureaucratic to entrepreneurial control of the class (Block, 1987). They seek to educate and energize rather than to dictate and suffocate their students.

## Why Adopt An Empowerment Paradigm?

There are a number of practical reasons for spending the time and energy necessary to create empowered students. First, as noted in the introduction, the desires and expectations of students have changed. Second, our interviews suggest that most students don't find the widely used bureaucratic pedagogical practices to be very motivating. Third, traditional bureaucratic pedagogies create powerlessness, frustration, dependence, stress, excessive competition, grade consciousness, and generally lower levels of motivation (c.f. Block, 1987; Glasser, 1990; McKeachie, 1986). Fourth, traditional pedagogies are not aligned with the practices and needs of industry (c.f. Dumaine, 1990; Stewart, 1991). In fact, many corporations are suggesting that our product, students, lack necessary skills and

competencies. As one human resource manager told us, the cost of training the college graduates we have hired recently in both rudimentary and functional skills has almost caught up with the cost of sending them to school in the first place ... one of these expenses has got to go. Comments like this serve as a warning sign that our customers are not happy. Therefore, if we adopt the customer-orientation (e.g., Peters & Austin, 1985) so many of us preach then our production process or pedagogy should change.

There are also theoretical and empirical reasons for using an empowerment based paradigm. After interviewing ninety outstanding leaders, Bennis & Nanus (1985) summarized the benefits of empowerment. They concluded that empowerment makes people feel significant, excited and challenged by their work, like their work really matters, and like they are part of a team. Other benefits noted in the management literature include: a) increased feelings of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and motivation (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Macher, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990); b) decreased feelings of entrapment and dependence (Block, 1987); c) greater willingness to take-risks and innovate (Kanter, 1983; Peters & Austin, 1985); d) leader freedom and ability to pursue other objectives (Neilsen, 1986); and, e) greater willingness to go the "extra-mile" (Zemke, 1988). Empowerment encourages people to achieve higher levels of commitment and performance than seem possible with bureaucratic methods of management.

These outcomes seem equally possible in educational environments. This is exemplified by a student in Tom Peters' video, *Leadership Alliance*. In talking about the empowering techniques of his principal, he stated, "it's not that we have to be here ... we want to ... we are getting an education."

Our interviews paint a similar picture. Six themes emerged from students who reported experience in at least one class in which they felt involved in the teaching-learning process. The results are summarized as follows:

1) they felt like they took more responsibility for learning and applying the course topics;
2) they developed greater interest in the content of those classes;
3) they devoted more study, thought, and out of class discussion time to those classes;
4) they encouraged others to take that instructor and rated him/her more favorably than other instructors;
5) even when their grade fell below expectation, they more willingly accepted the outcome;
6) they felt greater identification with the instructor and the content of those classes than they felt with other instructors or classes.

Thus, it appears as if the teaching-learning process is enhanced in classes based on a paradigm of empowerment just as operations are enhanced in companies that practice empowerment.

Empowerment in the teaching-learning process stems from two sources: 1) the values faculty hold and express, and 2) the structure, practices, and policies they implement (Block, 1987; McKeachie, 1986). We used this section to define empowerment, to highlight the values empowering faculty hold, and to discuss the practical and theoretical reasons why business faculty should move from a bureaucratic to an empowerment based pedagogy.

### Bureaucratic Teaching Methods - Promoting Powerlessness

Block's (1987) conception of empowerment is based on the premise that a cycle of bureaucratic control "unintentionally encourages people to maintain what they have, to be cautious, and dependent" (p. 21). The bureaucratic cycle is characterized by four elements: a) the use of patriarchal contracts; b) the creation of myopic self-interest; c) the use of manipulative tactics; and, d) the perpetuation of a dependence mentality (Block, 1987). Block (1987) contends that while this cycle "has the advantage of clarity [it] pays the price of not allowing people to take responsibility" (p. 31). Further, the cycle: a) creates its own resistance; b) denies self-expression; c) reinforces the belief that success is outside the persons control; d) promotes approval seeking; e) makes people say what they don't mean; and, d) fosters the use of negative political behavior (Block, 1987). Thus, "operating in a

bureaucratic [cycle] increases the tendency to experience ourselves as vulnerable, losing control, and somewhat helpless" (Block, 1987, p. 68). Unfortunately, as we will discuss later in this section, this cycle has direct parallels to the way many business classes are conducted and it generates similar consequences.

Conger & Kanungo (1988) and Conger (1989) also discuss organizational variables that promote feelings of helplessness or powerlessness in employees. These variables include: a) organizational factors [e.g., bureaucratic climate], b) supervisory style [e.g., authoritarianism], c) reward system [e.g., non-contingency], and d) job design [e.g., high rule structure]. They suggest that when employees feel helpless or powerless a host of dysfunctions accrue which include low motivation, poor morale, low self-efficacy, lack of innovation. They argue that these variables should be the focal points for diagnosis and for intervention (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

Educationally, McKeachie (1986) suggests that faculty who view themselves as either experts who transmit information and concepts, or formal authorities who set goals and procedures, create grade consciousness, dependency, and a real fear of being stupid. The expert or authority roles are trademarks of bureaucratic classroom paradigms (McKeachie, 1986). Thus, it appears as if the roles many faculty have and continue to play in the teaching-learning process actually impede realizing the outcomes they desire. As Kerr (1975) might say, traditional teaching practices create the paradox of "rewarding 'A' while hoping for 'B.'"

To expand on the work of Block (1987), Conger & Kanungo (1988), McKeachie (1986) and others of this sort, we recently asked 160 junior and senior students to generate a list of class and faculty practices that make them feel powerless. That is, after reading and discussing Conger (1989), we asked our students to apply this knowledge to their college experience and develop lists of faculty or class practices that inhibit their interest and motivation in the teaching-learning process. The

following presents a few of the issues they raised; each is accompanied with the percentage of students who listed that concern, and the extent to which they believed they had experienced that issue while in college.

| Issue | Percent | Extent |
|---|---|---|
| No participation in setting due/exam dates | 100 | Very Often |
| Prof. evaluations only done at end of class | 100 | Very Often |
| Lecture orientation/class format | 97 | Very Often |
| Professor doesn't know their name | 95 | Very Often |
| Attendance policies | 95 | Very Often |
| Not allowed/encouraged to participate | 95 | Very Often |
| Mass (40 or more people) lectures | 94 | Very Often |
| Reliance on multiple choice/short answer exams | 93 | Very Often |
| Sitting in rows/seating charts | 93 | Very Often |
| Professor over-use/reliance on over-heads | 92 | Very Often |
| Material not related to life/work world | 91 | Very Often |
| Lack of choice/creativity in assignments | 90 | Very Often |
| T/A's grading work | 83 | Often |
| Lack of specificity in assignments | 81 | Often |
| Faculty too busy/not interested in meeting them | 76 | Often |

Three comments deserve particular attention. First, most of the issues are "time-honored" standard operating procedures of college instruction. Second, the percentage and frequency columns reveal these are not isolated incidents. Third, except for semantic differences, the issues listed parallel the factors that promote employee feelings of powerlessness noted by Block (1987), Conger & Kanungo (1988), and Conger (1989). Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that there is widespread use of traditional bureaucratic teaching practices and these practices generate dysfunctions in the teaching-learning process that are similar to the problems bureaucratic management styles promote in industry.

Current thinking in organizational behavior points to the effectiveness of empowerment in organizations. The underlying assumption of this section, however, is that faculty create a paradox for their students. They espouse the virtues of empowerment while simultaneously implementing procedures and conducting class in a bureaucratic fashion. That more than a few faculty engage

in the sending of such mixed message is reflected in the works of McKeachie (1986), Glasser (1990), and the results of our interviews and pilot study. This section suggests that the traditional practice of instruction to which many faculty are accustomed creates feelings of powerlessness and fosters the dysfunctions associated with such feelings (Glasser, 1990).

## Creating Empowered Learners

"The admonition to go forth and empower your [students] is as frustrating as it is compelling" (Zemke, 1988, p. 63). As Block (1987) states, "there is nothing more difficult in the creation of an entrepreneurial cycle than to ask people to let go of [their] historical, popular, and well reinforced [attitudes and behaviors]" (p. 93). An empowerment based teaching paradigm asks both faculty and students to let go of tradition.

The role of faculty is to create conditions that encourage students to make demands on themselves and seek intellectual self-sufficiency (Belenky, et al., 1986; Glasser, 1990; McKeachie, 1986). This section will indicate how faculty can apply the management literature on empowering employees to the process of empowering students. The discussion is somewhat general because a complete list of empowerment techniques is beyond the limits of this paper and is available in more detail elsewhere (c.f. Belenky, et al., 1986; Glasser, 1990; Greeson, et al., 1991; McKeachie, 1986; Peters & Austin, 1985; Shulman & Luechauer, 1991).

An empowering cycle can be characterized by four elements: a) the use of entrepreneurial contracts; b) the creation of enlightened self-interest; c) the use of authentic tactics; and, d) the development of autonomy (Block, 1987). Block (1987) devotes considerable effort to indicating how these elements act as antidotes for bureaucracy. The practices he describes are as applicable to the teaching-learning process as they are to industry. Examples include: faculty calling and viewing themselves facilitators rather than instructors, creating a vision for the

class, conducting attitude surveys during the term rather than at the end of the term only, encouraging participation and free expression, being flexible in setting assignment due dates, being more supportive and less judgmental, being more open with information [e.g., stating how they intend to grade assignments], and being available to students.

Conger & Kanungo (1988) and Conger (1989) suggest that the primary way to empower employees is to identify the factors that promote powerlessness and then endeavor to remove them. As we noted earlier, students had little problem identifying faculty and class practices which promote feelings of powerlessness. Most of the issues they listed are easily corrected. Some examples to help elucidate this point: a) allow students to identify preferred exam or assignment due dates; b) provide a "smorgasbord" of potential assignments and allow students to select those that they deem most relevant; c) let each student select the weight his/her assignments receive; d) allow students to run class on selected days; e) remove attendance policies or let the students create their own; f) create a contract grading scheme [e g. M.B.O.]; and/or, g) let students, as we have, evaluate some of their own work or the work of their peers.

Glasser (1990) implores faculty to assume the empowering leader role rather than a coercive boss role to achieve high quality work from students. Glasser (1990) asserts that real power comes from students' perceptions of the faculty as competent to do the job, which is to show and model what is to be done and create a good environment in which to work. Concerning showing and modeling, the previous section indicates that many faculty send mixed messages to their students. They talk quality and participation yet model bureaucracy. Therefore, one place to begin empowerment is with faculty practices (Block, 1987). Environmentally, Glasser (1990) observes that those who bemoan students as not motivated to work are really admitting that they do not know how to create a

motivating climate. Thus, faculty should devote time to creating learning environments that enable students to easily see how their own intrinsic needs can be met by performing high quality work (Block, 1987; Conger, 1989; Glasser, 1990).

Finally, we should note that empowerment, is not only the faculty's responsibility. Therefore, an additional strategy we have employed is not only to ask our students what makes them feel powerless but also request that they generate their own ideas on how to overcome these barriers (c.f. Conger, 1989; Walton, 1990). Sometimes their ideas work. Sometimes they do not. However, the important point is that the students feel they played a role in the process. This usually leads to increased commitment and acceptance of the concomitant rewards or consequences (Block, 1987; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Conger 1989).

For many faculty the ideas espoused in this section may seem radical. They may fear that students simply can not be trusted to assume the level of responsibility this paradigm requires. These are the same concerns managers often raise regarding their employees. Nonetheless, we should remember that Peters & Austin (1985) and many others have found that workers set more stringent control and quality standards when they are generated from the bottom-up not dictated from the top-down. Furthermore, these ideas are based on the belief that if companies such as G.M., Harley, Johnsonville, Quad Graphics, and others can trust 18-22 year olds on the shop floor to measure their own performance, design their own systems, tinker with multi-million dollar machinery, and hire or fire employees, surely faculty can allow and promote greater levels of student involvement in the teaching-learning process (Peters' videos on *Leadership & Chaos*).

Empowerment in both management and education is a philosophy as well as a practice. Philosophically, the move to an empowerment based paradigm is rooted in trust, in the belief that students want more from a class than a grade,

and in the idea that if given a chance both students and faculty can rise to the level of responsibility required by implementing such a paradigm. Operationally, the list of techniques faculty might employ to empower students is limited only by creativity and contextual appropriateness. The key is to fashion an open, creative, team environment in which both faculty and students understand the vision [e.g., empowerment] and are motivated to contribute to its success (c.f. Walton, 1990). Therefore, for those who are optimistic and willing to try; there are infinite ways to operationalize an empowerment based paradigm and defeat the dysfunctions associated with a bureaucratic orientation to the teaching-learning process.

## Limitations To Implementing An Empowerment Based Paradigm

Empowerment is not for everyone or for the faint of heart (Block, 1987; Peters & Austin, 1985; Conger, 1989). In his preface, Block (1987) observes "you may feel very strongly that a [bureaucratic pedagogy] is ... a living example of your own deepest beliefs ... that it operates very efficiently and achieves your goals ... that [student] gratification should be postponed and [your class] is not a place for self-expression ... that [being a student] holds no promise for meaning or great satisfaction" (p. xxii). If so, empowerment is not for you. Peters & Austin's (1985) chapter "what price excellence" specifically discusses the time, effort, and energy that must be put forth to achieve excellence. Such effort requires both personal and professional sacrifices. The same is true for becoming an empowered teacher; if the price is perceived as too high - empowerment is not for you. Finally, empowerment is not for faculty who feel insecure. As Kanter (1979) writes "only [faculty] who feel secure in their own power outward ... can see empowering [students] as a gain rather than a loss" (p. 74).

To these comments we would add that empowerment is not for faculty who believe their students do not possess the requisite skills, experience, desire, or knowledge to take control and responsibility for their own learning. For these

people we suggest reading Plato's *Apology*. He knew that learning and meaning lies in the student not in the teacher. Likewise, students today are more independent and used to fending for themselves [e.g., latch-key-kids] than ever before. They do not need faculty who re-read them the book, whose lectures simply list for them the things that only the instructor thinks they "need to know." Rather, students of today need faculty who help them explore and see how the concepts presented in class can be applied to the world they currently inhabit and the world they plan to enter.

We freely admit that in the face of personal, professional, institutional, and social pressures empowerment is not easy. It is the road less traveled. Nonetheless, some instructors have and are currently traveling this road. It is challenging, but it is possible.

## Conclusion

A colleague who read an earlier draft of this manuscript was moved to remind us, "At the end of the movie *Dead Poets Society*, Robin Williams' character got fired." We felt compelled to respond, "But his students gave him a standing ovation on the way out." To use Belenky, et al.'s (1986) term, Williams' character connected with his students. This connection was achieved through trust, empathy, and genuine concern. It did not rely on coercion, the recitation of lecture notes, or dependence on extrinsic factors such as grades or threats for motivation. We believe that shifting paradigms from bureaucracy to empowerment in the classroom is imperative for the nineties. We do not believe, however, that every instructor must emulate the empowered teaching style Robin Williams portrayed. Rather, we have endeavored to show that the empowerment paradigm with roots in the literature of education and management (both applied and theoretical) can offer new exciting ways to conduct class. Moreover, the

empowerment paradigm can guide faculty behavior so that students will be better prepared to make the transition from the classroom to the boardroom.

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